# Cold Cuts

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# Cold Cuts

by tastymangopudding

Summary

Satsuki is having trouble with old memories in the months after defeating her mother. She embarks on a path of self-destruction, and it seems only her sister can reach her-in more ways than one.

Notes

This work contains depictions of self-harm and like behaviors. Reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the work for more notes

# Chapter 1

Satsuki awoke in a cold sweat, her screams slowly fading into the recesses of her mind. She could still hear her own pleading voice against the serpentine tone of her mother's.

*N-no! Mother, please! Stop! I-I can't! Ple-AAAAH!* She shuddered as she felt the icy cold fingers wrap around her arms, sliding down her sides, and up her thighs. Satsuki let out a strangled cry, hurling tangled bed sheets across the room before hugging her knees and sobbing.

*I'm still here,* Ragyo's voice resonated in her mind still. *And one of these days, I'm going to GET YOU! I bet you want it, you sick girl. I bet you-* Satsuki screamed again, covering her ears uselessly. She knew there was really only one way to rid herself of the pain, the voices, the grabbing fingers.

Still weeping, the tall woman slowly traversed her large room to the bathroom. Inside, Satsuki stared at herself in the mirror in disgust. *Look at you. You're weak. You're stupid. She took advantage of you and you couldn't say ANYTHING! No one can ever love a broken girl like you! NO ONE!* Satsuki cried out in anguish, lashing out at the mirror suddenly. Her fist landed with a solid *CRACK!*, splintering the glass and causing her hand to throb. Ignoring the pain, she turned towards the medicine cabinet.

Opening the mirrored box, she quickly located what she was searching for. Reaching past the toothbrushes and bars of soap, she extracted a metal tin. Satsuki trembled as she turned on the shower and stepped tentatively inside, not bothering to take off her nightgown. Tears still flowing, her shaking hands opened the case and extracted a razor blade that seemed to gleam in the artificial light. Sliding down the wall to take a seat, Satsuki half-smiled.

*Take away my pain.* She gasped, as always, as she made the first cut, drawing a dark red line across her forearm. The sweet sharp pain of the initial cut always brought a sort of perverse pained pleasure to Satsuki's entire being. Another followed, and then another. The blood flowed as readily as her tears, mixing with the shower and pooling in a murky red mix by drain as it was swept into the pipes. After she ran out of room for the time being, Satsuki stared at the neat row of horizontal gashes from wrist to elbow. A crimson tide continued to seep from the wounds. The throbbing that was so soothing began to kick in after the initial stinging stopped, and the dark-haired girl sighed as she washed and dried the razor, replacing

it alongside its brethren. She began to apply pressure to the cuts to stem the flow, not wanting to bleed too much-yet.

Once the bleeding eventually stopped, and the blood had washed down the drain, Satsuki finally stood and turned off the water, relishing the last of the pain as it slowly faded into numbness. Looking down at herself, she noticed the red stains on her nightgown, effectively ruining the otherwise flawlessly white garment. *Stained. Ruined. Just like you,* she thought, staring in the mirror again. Satsuki stripped off the nightgown and examined her body and handiwork.

Ever since the death of her and Ryuko's mother, she had begun to have these nightmares and horrible sensations. They reminded her of all the horrors she endured, from her childhood "purification" to her capture and torture after the Grand Sports and Culture Festival. For a while Satsuki simply cried silently and endured, but then the flashbacks became more real. She could feel the hands on her body, feel the fingers probing and violating her, feel the breath on her neck, and hear the sickeningly sweet voice of Ragyo Kiryuin.

Satsuki couldn't quite remember when she had started cutting, but it worked. So well in fact, that now there was a constant reminder whenever she looked in the mirror. The scars adorned her legs and arms, up and down. Neat rows of marks from countless razor blades, some had almost faded, where others that had become infected stood out more prominently, like mountain ranges on her skin. They had begun to overlap on her thighs from repeated slashing, and now there were fresh red lines on her forearm to begin a new layer. Feeling completely numb, Satsuki took one last deep breath before picking up the soggy heap of her nightgown, putting the razor case back in its place, and heading back to bed.

*Sweet dreams,* Satsuki told herself as she nestled back into her comforter. Somehow, it didn't sound all that convincing.

# Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Shit happens, people worry. A wild Ryuko appears! Sisterly bonding, that doesn't go quite so well...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ryuko took a deep breath as she stood before the imposing double doors, fist frozen in the air mid-knock. *Well, here goes nothing, I guess. I do wonder if she's okay. I mean, she hasn't been very responsive to my texts or calls, or really anyone's. What if she-oh, stop it, Ryuko! You're worrying too much. KNOCK! KNOCK!*

As she waited for a response, Ryuko pondered what had really happened to her dearest sister over the past few months. Ever since the defeat of Ragyo, Satsuki had become much more reclusive, retreating into the solitude of the Kiryuin manor as she sent Soroi on a vacation of indeterminate length. The former Student Council President also became much less responsive to Ryuko's (and the rest of the Elite Four's) attempts to communicate with her. She would ignore most texts entirely, and respond to calls quickly and curtly, most conversations lasting no more than a few minutes.

Needless to say, it had been a huge victory for everyone when Ryuko had managed to get Satsuki to agree to meet up for lunch once a week. While the older girl seemed reluctant from the start, she had softened a little when Ryuko noted that they hadn't really had any sisterly bonding time in the months where they actually knew they were siblings. So an agreement was reached where every week, Ryuko would go pick up Satsuki at her place and drive to their favorite café for some tea and sandwiches.

After a minute or so, the doors opened slowly to reveal a slightly flustered Satsuki, who appeared as if she had just woken from a restless sleep. Her hair was snarled in a very un-Satsuki manner, and her eyes were bloodshot. The bags under her eyes suggested a lack of sleep for quite some time now. Ryuko made a mental note to bring this all up later when Satsuki had some caffeinated tea in her.

“Nee-san! How’s my favorite sister in the world?” Ryuko said with energy akin to Mako’s as she pulled the taller girl into a warm embrace. Satsuki grimaced almost imperceptibly as she weakly returned the hug.

“H-hello imouto. It’s good to see you again.” Ryuko frowned as she surveyed Satsuki’s uncharacteristic dress. Ryuko’s beloved Nee-san wore very casual baggy sweatpants and a large hoodie, in contrast with the long dress and long-sleeved dress shirt from the week prior. *I don’t know why I’m paying so much attention to her dress anyway. It’s not like it’s any of my business. She’s probably just getting used to not having to stress about work all the time. Yeah, that’s it.* “Ryuko? Are you alright?”

Satsuki’s quiet tone snapped Ryuko out of her thoughts.

“Yeah, I’m good,” the younger girl grinned. “So, are you ready to do this shit, or what?” Without waiting for a response, she grabbed her sister’s hand and pulled her perhaps a bit too forcefully over to the car. Ryuko’s eyebrows furrowed as Satsuki pulled back sharply from Ryuko’s grasp, clutching her arm to her chest with an odd look in her eyes. Ryuko couldn’t help but feel slightly hurt as she glanced at her sister’s face. *Is she…scared? Nah, I’m imagining things again. Right?*

“You okay, Nee-san?” Ryuko asked, genuinely concerned at this point. Suddenly her thoughts were filled with recollections of Satsuki’s declining mood and general aura in the past months. Worry seized her chest, making it momentarily hard to breathe. “Satsuki? Are you all right? Satsuki?!”

The taller girl shook her head suddenly, before turning to Ryuko and smiling weakly and unconvincingly.

“Y-yeah. I-I’m okay. Let’s just go to lunch,” Satsuki said almost pleadingly.

*What is going on with her?* Ryuko simply nodded and grinned reassuringly, sliding into her seat and starting the engine as Satsuki sat next to her. *I need to get to the bottom of this, and get the Elite Four’s views on it.* The messy-haired made a mental checklist, as she pulled out of the driveway.

“Here we go, Nee-san! Hope you’re hungry!” Satsuki only nodded, eyes staring forward and hands gripping the armrests tightly. Ryuko sighed, hoping the drive would be over soon.

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Ryuko made sounds of utter delight and satisfied grunts as she dug into her sandwich. Satsuki smiled slightly, only poking at her salad. She had yet to eat a single bite.

“Mmm-Nee-san? What’s wrong? Not hungry?” Ryuko attempted to speak through a mouthful of sandwich.

“Yes, I’m fine. Just-not hungry, I guess.” Satsuki took a deep breath before answering, eyes closed and brow furrowed. Ryuko put down her food and frowned, swiping the back of her hand across her mouth.

“Aw, c’mon Satsuki. You and I both know that’s bullshit. You’ve been really…different lately. I guess what I’m trying to say is-well, I’m worried about you. I care about you, and I don’t want you to have to deal with whatever your problems are alone. Please. I’m your sister, and I’ll always be here for you. I know we aren’t that well connected, but now’s as good a time as any to start, right?” Ryuko spoke with genuine concern in her voice that was almost tangible, like a warm hug enveloping Satsuki’s anxiety-ridden mind. The older girl felt a sudden heaviness in her chest as a surge of conflicting thoughts and emotions wrestled in her mind.

*She cares! Someone really cares about me, if only a little. She actually loves me for me.*

*No, you poor, disillusioned little girl. No one could ever love you or care about you. You couldn’t help out your sister in the past, so why should she help you now? All you’ve caused for her is trouble.*

*B-but…she…she does care! She’s my sister, and she loves me for who I am!*

*Well, you are more of an imbecile than I thought. Can't you see by now that no one really cares about you? Certainly not your family. The only "care" you've ever gotten is PITY.*

*N-NO! Stop! I…I won't…it's not true!*

*Now I'm getting through to you. NOBODY CARES. You might as well go right now and slit your fucking throat in the bathroom. You do have your…kit on you, right?*

*Shut up! SHUT UP!*

*Of course you do. You always have it. But it's not like Ryuko would care, or even wonder what's taking you so long.. She'd probably get up and slip out quietly. You're too weak and pathetic to be her sister. Ha, I bet she doesn't even care enough to even try to pay the bill.*

*SHUT THE FUCK UP! GET OUT OF MY FUCKING HEAD!*

*Oh Satsuki, you really*-"really, really need to respond! Please! Satsuki!" The tall woman glanced up in surprise, suddenly snapping back to reality. Ryuko knelt in front of her, hands on her shoulders, and a look of frightened concern etched in her face.

"R-Ryuko? W-what-" Satsuki was interrupted as she was pulled into a crushing embrace.

"Oh my god Satsuki, are you alright? What happened? You spaced out, and started grabbing your head and shaking, and I tried to say something but you didn't hear me, and you started crying! I mean, full-blown crying. Then you said something, but I couldn't quite make it out- it was, like, 'get out of my head,' or something. C'mon Nee-san! It's pretty goddamn clear that something's up, and I just want to-" Satsuki suddenly shoved Ryuko back roughly, standing up. "N-Nee-san?"

*No, no no no no no no NO I need to go I need to get out of her I need to go numb myself I need to get rid of the pain get rid of the voices get them OUT OF MY FUCKING HEAD I can't stay here I need to leave*

“I-I’m s-sorry, Ryuko. I need…I need to go. I j-just c-c-can’t-“ Feeling her throat closing up and tears pricking the corners of her eyes, Satsuki turned and began to walk away, breaking into a run when Ryuko called out to her. *I’m sorry, imouto. P-please forgive me. Not that I deserve it anyway…*

Ryuko watched as Satsuki’s form faded into the distance, knowing that she couldn’t follow her sister now, no matter what her instincts were telling her. Slowly she rose to her feet, and pulled out her phone. She quickly scrolled through her contacts before sending out a group text.

*It’s finally happened,* she typed. *Meet me at my place. We need 2 talk ASAP.* Putting away her phone, Ryuko slumped down in her chair and put her head in her hands.

*Oh Satsuki…what is happening to you?*

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, here's chapter 2! (for those who saw the chapter 2 i uploaded earlier this morning, i found some things i didn't like and had to go change them for re-upload. I hope you don't hate me too much for this!) It's not all that great, but i hope you enjoy it. I mean, it's three in the morning, and what better to do than write, right? I'm going to try to update as much as possible, but my schedule is going to be much more hectic in the coming weeks. Still, I'll keep up to the best of my ability. Hang in there, Satsuki!

# Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Some scheming amongst friends. Ryuko has an interesting task ahead of her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“NO! We cannot let this continue! I will not let this continue. I, Gamagori Ira, as Lady Satsuki’s shield, refuse to let her continue suffering!”

“Sit down, Ira. We understand your passion, and we are all worried as well. However, a plan of sorts would be preferable to rushing in and risking driving Satsuki even further from us.” Inumuta stated calmly, sympathetic eyes resting on Gamagori’s furrowed brow and anxious expression. Gamagori pouted, folding his arms.

“Ryuko, can you explain again exactly what happened?” Sanageyama questioned.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Ryuko replied. She took a deep breath. “So Satsuki and I went to our weekly lunch meeting, right? And she’s been looking worse every week, but you guys already know that. When did you last see her?”

“Not for almost a month now,” Nonon muttered. The other three nodded. Ryuko sighed.

“Anyway, today she didn’t even bother putting on semi-formal clothes like she always does. Her eyes were bloodshot and she looked like she hasn’t been sleeping at all.” The Elites leaned in, concern and curiosity mixing on their faces. Mako sat next to Ryuko, listening intently and unmoving.

“So I got excited to go and pulled her to the car, but she kinda yanked away from me, and she almost looked scared. When I asked her, of course she told me she was fine. During lunch,

she didn't eat anything, and didn't speak very much. Finally I confronted her about what was wrong, and she got really distant. It-it was like she just spaced out. I went over to comfort her, but she pushed me away and ran. I-I don't know what to do!" Ryuko threw up her hands in frustration before slumping back against the couch. Mako put a comforting hand on her friend's shoulder, smiling warmly.

"Jeez, looks like the ice queen is melting," Nonon said mirthlessly. Sanageyama grunted his agreement. "Shut up, monkey. I don't need your goddamn approval." The petite girl frowned as the green-haired man made a series of uncouth gestures.

"Well, we need to do something! So, what should our course of action be to aid Lady Satsuki?" Gamagori said firmly.

"I think we need to have a sort of…intervention or something, to show her that we are all here for her and we'll do whatever it takes to make her feel better," Ryuko paused, pondering for a moment before continuing. "We can approach her calmly, maybe not even all at once. Maybe not even all of us need to be there, to be a less intimidating presence."

"That's not a bad idea, but what makes you think she'll even listen to us?" Sanageyama questioned, momentarily breaking the death stare Nonon held with him.

"I-I don't know. I haven't thought this through much myself. I guess…just some sisterly encouragement or some shit like that?"

"I do agree with Ryuko in that we need to intervene somehow," Inumuta spoke, hand stroking his chin in thought. "However, I don't think it should be an intervention as much as just changing her lifestyle a bit to incorporate us more, so she can be more comfortable sharing things with us."

"That is…a good idea. But how are we going to propose said changes to Lady Satsuki?" Gamagori raised an eyebrow.

"We could, I don't know, move in with her? I mean, the manor is more than big enough, and she lives there alone. Maybe she'd appreciate the company," Nonon suggested, shrugging.

“Eh, just a stupid idea.” Suddenly, Ryuko’s eyes lit up.

“Hey! That just might work, if we can get her to agree to it. I mean, I could say that I need a more stable place to stay or something, because I can’t keep paying the ridiculous rent Takarada charges on this fucking place,” Ryuko gestured at the walls around her. “It could be innocent enough, and we wouldn’t have to lie. I would keep in touch with you guys and keep you updated, all while carrying out a semi-normal life and getting closer to Satsuki.” Nonon smirked, satisfied that her suggestion had come to fruition.

“I don’t know. It sounds alright, but there’s always something that could go wrong,” Sanageyama said. “And knowing Lady Satsuki, I don’t think she would be too keen about opening up so quickly. I mean, just your presence could ‘scare her off,’ so to speak.”

“Of course, but that is why Ryuko has us, should she need us to assist her. We’d be there to advise her on different things, and vice versa.” Inumuta grinned, the full impact of the plan dawning on him. “I support this plan. Sure, there may be a few kinks to smooth out, but we’ll deal with them in due time.”

“Fine,” Nonon rolled her eyes, feigning annoyance. “But I want credit for coming up with this if it works. If it doesn’t, then it’s all Matoi’s fault. Although, I guess we will be able to hang out wit Satsuki again. If she’s willing to *live* with this shithead, it’s more than likely she’ll want to take a break from the fucking insanity.” Nonon shot Ryuko a glare after the taller girl punched her in the arm.

“Alright, I guess it seems like an okay plan,” Sanageyama said, still somewhat unsure. “I mean, moving in with her isn’t exactly a ‘minor’ change to her lifestyle, but I trust your sisterly abilities, Matoi.”

“Good luck out there, Ryuko-chan,” Mako smiled, giving her best friend a loving hug. Ryuko smiled back, realizing how much Mako had matured in the past few months, while still keeping her energy and cheeriness.

“Hey, uh, Mako,” Ryuko wheezed as Mako’s grip tightened, “you’re crushing me…”

“T-that’s enough, Makanshoku, let Matoi go,” Gamagori said nervously, peeling Mako gingerly from Ryuko. Blushing furiously as Mako gripped his arm instead, he said, “If you think you are best suited to aid our Lady Satsuki, you have my best wishes. Remember that we are here should you need us.” Mako nodded her agreement, still not relinquishing her hold of the giant’s arm.

“Yeah, sure thing guys. Thanks,” Ryuko exhaled, realizing the task she had ahead of getting her sister to open up to her, even if it took ages. Satsuki was not the overly emotional type. Ryuko knew that much. “Well, I’m going to get some sleep before confronting Miss Eyebrows tomorrow. You guys can let yourselves out whenever.” The Elite Four waved goodnight to Ryuko (with Mako still on Gamagori’s arm) as she went to her room.

*Hang in there, Nee-chan. I’m going to help you, I promise.* Ryuko sighed deeply as she closed her eyes and allowed sleep to take her.

Chapter End Notes

Here it is! Chapter 3. The Elite Four and Mako make their appearance! While I will probably make this story pretty Satsuki/Ryuko-centric, there will most likely be some chapters focusing on the others. Hope you guys enjoy the chapter!

# Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

A quick chapter, but an...interesting one.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter is so short, but i wanted to post something before i become really busy in day or two. Thanks for all of the positive feedback so far!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Well, I guess I went a little far that time. It doesn't matter. None of it matters anymore. Perhaps I will die, and finally be free from this suffering and my mother. Yes, I can feel her presence fading already.*

Satsuki closed her eyes, leaning back against the shower wall with a contented sigh as she placed the razor down next to her. The blood gushing down her arms was pooling all around her, staining the white tiles a dark red that the water wasn't washing away in time. She had perhaps gone too far, done a bit too much to run from Ragyo. She had never meant to press that hard, to cut that deep-or so she told herself in that moment.

*No, there is never too much when I escape that monster. Anything to keep me from her. ANYTHING.*

Smiling now, Satsuki glanced down once again at her forearms, looking at the deep gashes, exposed tendons and ligaments grotesquely grinning back at her in the harsh white light. Her heart was pounding in her ears, and her vision was starting to become fuzzy. As such, she didn't hear the frantic banging at her door, or as it moved to her bedroom window.

*Goodbye, everyone. I'm sorry I wasn't strong enough or good enough for you. I-I couldn't even say goodbye in person. I hope you can find it in yourselves to forgive me. I know I don't*

*deserve it, but-CRASH!* She paused mid-thought, looking up. *Was that-the window? No, it must be the blood loss getting to me.*

Satsuki's head was pounding in sync with her heart at this point, and her vision was fading fast. *I'm sorry, imouto. We never got the chance to really be sisters…*

"SATSUKI! WHAT THE FUCK! WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK!" Ryuko was in the bathroom suddenly, smashing the heavy mahogany door off its hinges with inhuman strength. Satsuki groaned weakly as Ryuko rushed to grab gauze and bandages.

*N-no, Ryuko…please…let me go…*

Ryuko was upon her then, and Satsuki was too physically weak to resist as bandages were roughly wrapped around her forearms and she was lifted bridal-style out of the bathroom.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? No, no. Fuck that. That can come later. J-just hang in there, Nee-san. The EMTs will be here soon. Please please PLEASE hang in there Satsuki! Stay with me! SATSUKI!" Ryuko placed her sister gently on the bed and began to run around frantically, unsure of what to do as her sister's head lolled and her eyes closed.

*I-i-mouto…* Satsuki had time for a single thought before darkness took her.

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"Goddammit! You fucking stupid monkey! Look what you fucking did!" Sanageyama cackled as he dodged a flying drumstick, having ruined Nonon's recording session.

"Not my fault your music sucks, snake!" The green-haired man snapped back. Suddenly, it felt as if a vise had closed on his head. "Ow! Shit! What the hell, Gamagori?"

“Silence, Sanageyama, Nonon. There is no time for arguing. Remember, Matoi may need our advice soon.” The giant man released his grip, sitting back down next to a smiling Mako.

“Yes, I do hope that everything goes well for Ryuko. She hasn’t spoken to Lady Satsuki since their lunch meeting two days ago, so hopefully Satsuki is receptive to her,” Inumuta noted, busy typing on his laptop. “Time to see if our plan falls flat or not.”

“Indeed, I am most anxious,” Gamagori said, his leg bouncing faster than a hummingbird’s wings. Mako placed a gentle hand on his thigh, and the movement suddenly ceased, replaced by a bright red color on the giant’s cheeks. Mako simply smiled innocently, as always.

“Gamagori and Mako, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-“ Sanageyama began, suddenly cut off by a giant fist knocking him over the couch. “Fuck! Dammit, Ira!”

“You did ask for it,” Mako said pleasantly enough.

“Hang on dipshits, Ryuko’s calling,” Nonon announced, holding up the house phone. “Hello? Ryuko? How did-“ The others watched anxiously as Nonon turned pale and grew silent. “Yeah. Okay. We’ll be right over.” She hung up, dropping the phone and her head collapsing into her hands. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck! FUCK!” The petite girl screamed, jumping up and pounding the table.

“Calm down, Nonon. What happened?” Inumuta asked, worry etched into his face.

“I-they-Satsu-Ryu-I don-“ Nonon took a deep breath before beginning to speak. “We need to get to the hospital, NOW.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, that escalated quickly. Hope you enjoyed the chapter! I apologize in advance, as I will be a bit busy this week. As a result, the next update may be a bit late, but i hope you'll bear with me here. Thanks again!

# Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> ...plot development?

Chapter Notes

> Turns out i had time for one more chapter! Bear with me here, I will try to keep this story going to the best of my ability. Thanks for all your continued support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The daylight was slowly fading as Satsuki walked out of the large garden and towards the house. She took a seat on the stairs, taking her teacup from the floor and sipping it delicately. The warm fluid gushed down her throat, warming her chest and causing her to smile. The dark-haired woman surveyed the garden and the rest of the mansion grounds before her.

*How the times have changed.* Satsuki closed her eyes as she took another sip of tea, when she felt strong arms encircle her midsection from behind. The tall woman sighed contentedly and leaned backwards into the embrace. She turned around to face her hugger, and was met with soft, firm lips upon her own. Satsuki returned the kiss, cupping the other's head with a hand. The two broke off the kiss after a moment to breathe, and Satsuki's lover put her head in Satsuki's lap.

"I love you, Nee-san," Ryuko mused, staring up into her sister's cerulean eyes and smiling. She slipped her hand into Satsuki's, who interlaced their fingers.

"I love you too, imouto," Satsuki replied, stroking Ryuko's hair and leaning in to plant a soft kiss on her sister's forehead. The two of them sat there a while as the sun set, holding hands silently and enjoying each other's company. After the rather romantic scene, Ryuko stood and, despite her sister's protests, lifted her up bridal-style and carried her all the way to the bedroom.

Once near the bed, Satsuki wriggled out of Ryuko's grasp and tackled her sister into the bed.

"Hey! What do you think y-" Ryuko was cut off as Satsuki put her in a headlock. The younger woman suddenly twisted her hips in a corkscrew, slipping out of the hold and grabbing her sister by the shoulders, bringing both women down to the bed. There they lay, faces mere inches apart, until Ryuko cupped Satsuki's cheek and pulled her into another gentle kiss.

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As Satsuki lay in the darkness, held tightly from behind by her dear sister, she smiled, feeling at peace. No more voices. No more Ragyo. As the tall woman's eyelids grew heavy, she happened to glance at her outstretched arm.

*That's…odd. No…no scars? I c…cou…ld've…swor…Z…Z…Z…* Satsuki's thoughts faded into sleep, enveloped by the warmth of her sister.

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As soon as she opened her eyes, she regretted it as they were mercilessly bombarded by a harsh gleam of bright white artificial light.

*Wha…? Where…am I? Where's Ryuko?* She squinted under the overhead fluorescent tubes, and tried to move her arm to block to her eyes, but was met with resistance. Looking down in shock, she saw her arms were strapped down to a…hospital bed? Swathes of white bandages covered her forearms, and they throbbed dully. Each wrist was held in place by thick leather straps, as well as her ankles.

*Ryuko? R-Ryuko? Where are you? What…* Slowly the memories started coming back t her. That night, in the shower, watching her life bleed out of her arms and flow down the drain… Ryuko bursting in and…ruining everything. *A…a dream? What kind of a dream was that? No! Satsuki! She's your sister, for fuck's sake!*

Suddenly panic seized Satsuki's body. She was in the hospital. The *hospital*. Ryuko had ended her not-so-accidental…attempt. Now she was a prisoner.

*N-no. No. It can't be. Th-this isn't real! I'm not…I'm not here! I'm not some sort of animal to be chained up!*

She tried again to move her arms, but nothing happened. Satsuki began to flail her limbs frantically, but to no avail. Veins stood out in her neck and forehead as she strained against the restraints. Realizing that she was at the mercy of her shackles, she began to cry. Near-silent sobs racked her chest, and hot, stinging tears flowed down her face. Yet she continued to struggle.

*Why I am still alive? No…this can't be happening. I should be dead. I should be-* The touch of a hand on her arm stopped her thoughts and her struggling, and she looked for the first time at the figure at her side. Through teary eyes, she saw a blurry outline that seemed vaguely familiar. Trying to speak, a sudden wave of drowsiness hit her. As her vision faded yet again, she was able to make out a streak of red hair amongst a messy black mane.

"R-Ryuko…" The life-fiber-infused girl smiled and stroked Satsuki's arm reassuringly as she faded into a dreamless sleep.

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Four heads turned and looked expectantly at Ryuko as she entered the lobby.

"Well? How is she?" Nonon seemed rather anxious for an answer, as did the rest of the Elites.

"She's…awake. When she saw that she was restrained, she kinda went into a frenzy. The nurse had to knock her out to avoid potential injury. But I think when she noticed me, she calmed down a bit." Ryuko ran a hand through her messy hair, exhaling slowly.

“Will they let people other than family visit soon?” Inumuta asked the other question on the Elites’ minds.

“I dunno. The doctor said it depends on her…progress and cooperation. She’ll continue to be…restrained until she becomes more...’stable,’ as the doctor put it.”

“Well shit. She might be here for a while then,” Sanageyama said.

“No, Lady Satsuki cannot be imprisoned against her will! I, Gamagori Ira, will see that she does not suffer in isolation!” The giant man stood quickly, knocking over several chairs and turning heads of other grieving families. “Uh…I…I apologize,” Gamagori muttered, sitting back down.

“I asked them when she could be discharged, and they said when they think she no longer posed an imminent threat to herself, we could take her back. Of course, someone would have to live with her for a while, and I’m completely willing to do that. But we need her to agree to a plan, else she’ll be here even longer.” Ryuko sighed angrily, sliding down her chair. “I still don’t know why she…why s-she…” Ryuko’s voice trailed off as her shoulders began shaking with silent sobs.

“Um…d-don’t… don’t worry Matoi, we, um, I mean, uh, I’m sure she’ll be alright,” Sanageyama put an awkward hand on Ryuko’s shoulder, unsure of what to do. Inumuta snorted a barely suppressed laugh.

“You shithead, this is how you comfort someone,” Nonon rolled her eyes as she pulled Ryuko to her feet, then into a comforting hug. “Hey, you underachiever. It’s okay. This is Satsuki we’re talking about here. She’s been through worse.” Inumuta snorted again behind a hand, then began coughing loudly, before excusing himself to get a drink.

“Y-yeah, I guess so,” Ryuko nodded weakly, sniffling as she tried to regain her composure. *But…has she given up this time?*

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. I wonder what Satsuki will do when she wakes up...

# Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Moving into a new phase of life.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long delay! I've been busy with work. Thanks again for sticking with me and for your continued support!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey there! How’s our tough little patient doing? Are you ready for your medication?” Satsuki only rolled her eyes and scowled at the over-excited nurse who entered the room with her pills and water. After her first week in the hospital, the doctors decided that putting her on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication would be something good to try.

“Just give me the goddamn pills,” Satsuki growled as the nurse handed her the various capsules, still smiling pleasantly. Satsuki gulped down the medicine and threw the plastic cup across the room.

“C’mon now Satsuki, how are you going to show the doctors your progress if you still continue to act like this? Sure, we can’t force you to talk about your past and your problems, but you could at least cooperate a little with us.” The nurse looked at Satsuki with a smile that made the former Student Council President want to punch her in the face.

“Shut up. All I care about is getting out of here. I guess being out of the restraints is a step. When is Ryuko coming to visit, and when can I my other friends visit as well?”

“Visiting hours are from 10 to-“

“I know when the fucking times are. How long until then? There’s no damn clock in this room.” Satsuki snarled, her brow furrowing.

“Satsuki,” the nurse chided, “Let’s not get aggressive now. You don’t want to have another episode and be sedated again, do you?” The sickeningly pleasant woman raised an eyebrow warningly.

“I suppose not,” the patient grumbled angrily, closing her eyes in resignation. *Fuck you.*

“Your sister will be here in half an hour. As for your friends, that’s up to the doctors. In fact, if we get a plan together, you might be discharged before then, and you can meet them in person.”

“Fan-fucking-tastic.” Satsuki spat. As the nurse left the room, Satsuki reflected on her current mood. She had noticed herself becoming more and more hostile towards the hospital staff over the past week, and the only thing that kept her from losing it was Ryuko visiting every day to check on her, chat, and just provide company. As much as she was reluctant to admit it, she did feel at least a bit more assured that at least someone possibly cared about her.

Suddenly Satsuki found the vivid memory of her odd dream about Ryuko resurfacing in her mind. It had been a week since it happened, yet every time she thought about Ryuko before she visited, she remembered the dream in detail.

*What the hell* was *that? Why did I have that dream in the first place? And why is it stuck in my head? I mean, it did feel good to be rid of…mother…but…I don’t feel that way about my own sister! At least…I think…*

Satsuki shook her head sharply, chasing away the thoughts. *Stay in the present.* Gritting her teeth, she waited in silence for the next half hour.

***

“Nee-san! Guess who!” Ryuko said cheerfully, coming in the room with a big smile on her face. Satsuki couldn’t help but crack a small smile of her own.

“Hey, imouto. How are you today?”

“Oh, you know, same old bunch of shit going on, and I’m, like, still outta a job,” Ryuko said, rubbing the back of her neck nervously. “But I’ve been talking with the doctors, and I have great news!”

“Oh?” Satsuki raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah, they said you were making enough progress and that you could be discharged today! But, we do have a plan you have to agree to,” Ryuko added the last part on hesitantly, looking at Satsuki expectantly.

“Well? What is this amazing plan of yours?”

“Well, um, you could live at home, but since I’m your only remaining blood relative, I would have to live with you for a while to, um-“

“Yeah, I get it. To “keep me safe.” Alright, Ryuko. Tell the doctors that’s fine by me, as long as I can get out of this godforsaken place.” Satsuki sighed, still smiling.

“YES! Sweet! I gotta go talk to the doctors and do some paperwork with the Elites, but I’ll be back shortly to, well, get you the fuck outta this shithole!” Ryuko ran in quickly, giving her sister a quick peck on the forehead before running down the hallway, fumbling with her phone.

Satsuki’s face lit up in a barely noticeable blush as Ryuko kissed her forehead. *What the hell, Satsuki? Stop thinking about that! You don’t feel that way…right? Yes! Of course! I mean, she is kind of pretty-No! Nope, no more.* The tall woman physically slapped herself this time,

clearing the thoughts from her head. *Yeah, at least I get to leave soon.* Feeling comforted at knowing she'd be free soon, Satsuki closed her eyes and lay back.

Ryuko's visit had been very brief, which made her a little sad, but the good news brushed all that aside and replaced it with excitement and…something else that Satsuki couldn't quite identify. She decided to ignore it for the time being. *Living with Ryuko…that'll be interesting.* Grinning to herself but unaware of it, Satsuki fell back into sleep, awaiting her escape.

***

Satsuki shuddered involuntarily as Ryuko pulled into the driveway of the Kiryuin manor. *No...wait…Ryuko's here. Ragyo's dead. It's okay.* The taller woman jumped as Ryuko placed a hand on her shoulder.

"You alright, Nee-san?" Satsuki turned away from the concern in her sister's eyes.

"Yeah. Let's just get inside." Ryuko nodded, opening her door before going around the car to open Satsuki's door. "Ryuko, it's fine, I can open the door myself-"

"C'mon Satsuki, when else am I going to get the chance to baby you? Let's go," the younger girl smiled, taking her sister by the hand and gently guiding her to the manor doors. Satsuki felt her ears burning and a warmth in her chest as Ryuko's hand gripped hers. She swallowed as Ryuko turned to face her. "Ready, Nee-san?" The taller girl only nodded.

"Let's go," she whispered. Ryuko opened the doors.

"SURPRISE! Welcome home Satsuki!" Satsuki jumped, startled, as she was greeted by the Elites and Mako, who wore party hats and had adorned the hallway of the manor with streamers and a "Welcome Back" banner. The tall woman turned to face Ryuko, who flashed her signature grin.

"Hey sis, what do ya think?"

“I think…I think it’s great. Thank you all for doing this. You didn’t have to…”

“Of course we did Satsuki! We’re your friends, after all,” Nonon smiled as Sanageyama gave a thumbs up. Gamagori bowed and Inumuta waved. Mako rushed forward, enveloping the startled Satsuki in a hug.

“Um…hey,” Satsuki said, looking down at the younger girl.

“Welcome back Satsuki-sama! We all were worried about you and missed you! I hope you feel better! I made some croquettes for us to celebrate your return!” Mako gestured at the large dining table in the dining room, which was piled with fried bundles of all shapes and sizes.

“C’mon sis! Let’s eat!” Ryuko took Satsuki’s hand yet again and led her to the table despite her protests.

“Mmm, Makanshoku, these smell as good as I remember them,” Sanageyama mumbled, drooling as Mako served everyone heaping portions of croquettes and seasoned rice.

“Enjoy everyone! I know we’re all grateful Satsuki-sama is home and feeling better now. Dig in!” Mako grinned, gesturing at the food before everyone. Gamagori said a quick thanks for the meal before everyone began to eat.

“So sis, how does it feel to be home?” Ryuko asked around a mouthful of rice, looking up at Satsuki, who was only picking at her food.

“Hmm?” The older girl shook her head slightly as if in a daze, before making eye contact with Ryuko. Suddenly she felt her cheeks burning and she averted her eyes. “I-I am glad to be home.”

“I’m happy you’re here with us,” Ryuko smiled, reaching out and poking her sister in the nose. Satsuki shook her head and chuckled.

***

“Bye Satsuki! We’ll be back next weekend!” Nonon waved as she and the other Elites headed out the door.

“See you guys,” Ryuko waved back, smiling to herself as she watched Mako cling tightly to Gamagori’s arm.

“I-I will t-take Makanshoku home,” the giant man mumbled nervously to his compatriots. Inumuta merely nodded as Sanageyama grinned and punched him in the shoulder. Nonon smirked and rolled her eyes.

“Have fun, you two. But not too much fun.” Gamagori’s face turned a deep purple. He was about to retort when Satsuki spoke.

“Thank you all…for everything.” She bowed her head in gratitude as she shut the door before turning to face Ryuko.

“Looks like it’s just you and me, sis! What do you wanna do?”

“Honestly Ryuko, I think I need to sleep,” Satsuki yawned to emphasize her point. “I’m tired from the day, and excited to sleep in my own bed again.”

“Sounds good, Nee-san! Let’s go,” Ryuko walked up the stairs, before turning back to her sister. “You coming?”

“A-are you going to bed too?” Satsuki felt her stomach jump as Ryuko dashed back down, taking her hand and pulling her upstairs.

“Of course! We’re sisters, right? We can do all the sisterly things we never got to before! We can sleep together, and bathe-“

“RYUKO!” Ryuko jumped, startled at Satsuki’s sudden cry. The taller girl winced a bit, knowing she had been more forceful than she had intended. “S-sorry. I, um, I think I’ll be f-fine-“

“Satsuki, I know more than you think.”

“Y-you d-do?” Satsuki swallowed, remembering her dream of Ryuko again suddenly.

“Yeah. I want to be able to be here for you if you have another nightmare or something.”

“You know about that?”

“I care enough to look into these things.”

Satsuki sighed.

“C’mon Nee-san, let’s get you to bed.” Ryuko smiled that caring smile of hers that made Satsuki want to melt. She was the one who reached for Ryuko’s hand this time, and she felt a small burst of joy when Ryuko interlaced their fingers before leading them to the bedroom.

“Um.” Satsuki looked awkwardly from the nightgown she was holding to Ryuko, then back to the nightgown. “D-do you m-mind, uh, turning-“ Satsuki’s heart stopped in her chest as Ryuko simply responded by stripping off her jacket, shirt, and skirt and putting on a plain t-shirt.

“You okay, Satsuki? You’re blushing…” Satsuki jumped, startled, as she suddenly found great interest in the carpet patterns.

“R-Ryuko, I-that is, I, um-“ she quickly dashed into the bathroom, where she changed as quickly as possible before coming back out. Ryuko whistled as she looked as Satsuki’s body, causing the older woman to bow her head in embarrassment.

“Wow sis, you’re damn sexy,” Ryuko said mischievously, waggling her eyebrows. Satsuki’s face quite resembled a tomato as she stammered.

“Ryuko! P-please!” The younger sister laughed heartily, before settling down in the large bed and patting the space next to her.

“C’mon, sis, this bed isn’t going to warm itself,” Ryuko smiled.

“I-um-“ Satsuki swallowed down her discomfort as she slid into bed next to Ryuko, feeling her sister’s bodily warmth press into her side. She heard Ryuko sigh almost inaudibly as she shifted slightly.

“Goodnight Nee-san.”

“G-goodnight, imouto.” Suddenly, Satsuki felt a sudden brief warmth and slight wetness on her cheek. *Did she just-*

“I love you, Satsuki.” Satsuki was too stunned to respond, and simply lay in silence as she heard Ryuko’s breathing slow down, eventually turning to soft snoring. Once she felt it was safe, Satsuki moved her back further into Ryuko’s side, taking in her warmth. *Fuck. I’ve fallen for my sister.* Somehow, it didn’t bother her as much as she expected.

“I love you too, Ryuko,” she whispered in the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Hmm. I wonder...

# Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> My gosh, I've been busy! So sorry for the extended delays between chapters, I'm trying my best in my spare time. I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

Ryuko awoke feeling well-rested. She yawned and arched her back in a glorious morning stretch, sighing, when she felt a strange resistance and warmth against her movement. Looking down, Ryuko noticed pale, slender arms encircling her torso. Slowly she turned to face the sleeping Satsuki.

*Aw, Nee-san,* Ryuko smiled, *you look so peaceful.* Satsuki's normally furrowed brow was relaxed, and a content smile adorned her face as she slept. Not wanting to wake up her sister, Ryuko slowly removed Satsuki's arms from herself and slunk away from the bed, heading to the kitchen.

*Hmm…* Ryuko browsed the contents of the fridge as she hummed to herself. Satisfied with what she found, she began to heat up a skillet as she cracked the first egg.

***

Satsuki sighed happily as Ryuko leaned into her side, slyly slipping her hand into Satsuki's own. The older sister planted a gentle kiss on the younger's forehead as she intertwined their fingers. Ryuko gazed up at Satsuki with eyes that projected love that was much more than sisterly.

"Ryuko…" Satsuki muttered dreamily, "You're so beautiful…" Ryuko responded with a chaste kiss on the lips before pulling back and tapping her sister on the nose.

"Wake up sis, it's breakfast time," she teased.

“Huh?”

*Wake up.*

Satsuki sat up suddenly, eyes searching the bedroom.

“Ryuko?” She called tentatively. No response. “Ryuko?”

Beginning to panic, Satsuki jumped out of bed and walked to the bedroom door when she caught a whiff of something delicious coming from the kitchen. Walking cautiously to the source, she exhaled a sigh of relief as she spotted Ryuko setting places for two at the table.

“Hey Nee-san, I hope it wasn’t too much of me to make you an omelet with your eggs,” Ryuko smiled. Satsuki shook her head.

“No, of course I don’t mind. Where did you learn to cook? It smells delicious!”

“Oh,” Ryuko shrugged, absently pushing a stray strand of hair behind her hair in a gesture that Satsuki couldn’t help but see as cute, “Mako taught me a few things in the time that we lived together.”

“Well, she did a good job in her teaching,” Satsuki nodded, sitting down and saying a quick thanks for the meal before beginning to eat. “This is even more delectable than it smells!”

“Glad you like it, Nee-san,” Ryuko grinned, digging into her own omelet with gusto. As Satsuki watched her sister eat, her mind wandered to the dream she had just had, so similar to a previous one… *No! Stop! I can’t think about this right no-wait. I’m back home…but I didn’t have a nightmare about Ragyo…could it be…Ryuko? Maybe.*

“You know, Ryuko,” Satsuki attempted offhandedly, “I usually have nightmares about…well, I usually have nightmares in this manor, but I didn’t last night.”

“Probably because I’m such a comforting sister,” Ryuko punched her sister in the shoulder, chuckling lightly.

“Perhaps,” Satsuki nodded, deciding not to worry about it for the time being. “Thanks again for the omelet, Ryuko. It was really good.”

“No problem! Anything for my dear sister,” Ryuko shot her sister a wink as she gathered both girls’ dishes and walked them to the sink. “So, what do you want to do today, Satsuki?” The older girl scratched her chin, thinking.

“I really don’t know. I haven’t really done all that much recently,” she said. “You can go out or something…I’ll be fine here by myself.”

“Nee-san!” Ryuko rolled her eyes. “We’re going out together to celebrate you coming back, and we’re going to have fun!”

“Ryuko, I-I don’t know-“

“Don’t give me that shit! Besides, I’ll lead the way. You can even call it a date or something if it makes you feel better.” Satsuki suddenly felt her face heating up.

“I-I t-think I’ll pass, thanks,” the older girl murmured.

“Aw, c’mon Satsuki! Look, in all seriousness, I want to have fun with you. Also, I don’t know how much I trust you after that stunt you pulled. So I think it would be good for both of us if we went out and did something!” Ryuko’s face showed serious undertones beneath the playful exterior that caused Satsuki to pause. She sighed.

“Alright Ryuko. Let’s go and do something…fun.”

“YES!” Ryuko pulled her sister into a tight hug.

“R-Ryuko-c-can’t-breathe-“ Satsuki wheezed, bowing her head once released to regain her breath and regain control over her rampant emotions. *Calm down! She’s your goddamn sister! She loves you, but not in that way! Yeah, I suppose there’s no denying now that I love my sister in a sick, twisted way. And now we’re spending a whole day out alone. Fuck.*

***

“Alright Nee-san, where do you want to go first?” Ryuko asked, pulling out of the driveway. Satsuki thought for a moment, looking out the window at the manor as it grew smaller and smaller.

“I don’t know. Perhaps the café we always go to for lunch?”

“Sounds good!” Ryuko chirped. “That is, if you’ll actually eat something this time.”

“Maybe…I don’t feel that hungry after your breakfast,” Satsuki said. Ryuko nodded.

“Okay. In that case, let’s stop by the park for a while! It’s a beautiful day, and we can enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells together.” Satsuki simply smiled, nodding her approval. With a silent fist pump, Ryuko’s hands tightened on the steering wheel, a look of determination and excitement dawning on her features.

*She looks happy. Unlike you. Not that you deserve to be anyway. You’re worthless. You are a stinking, useless, piece of filth and you don’t deserve ANYONE’S care.*

*No. NO. Not again. Please go away. Please get out of my head. I don’t need this. Not now. Not e-*

*You can't keep avoiding me, my dear Satsuki. I may be gone from your world, but I will never leave your thoughts. Late at night, I will be the one to keep you up. I will be here until the day you d-*

*SHUT UP!*

Satsuki jumped and yelped in surprise as she felt strong hands grip her shoulders. Looking up, her eyes met Ryuko's, which echoed care and concern.

"Satsuki."

"Ryuko, I-I'm sorry-I didn't m-mean to-"

"Stop." Satsuki was surprised at the force behind her sister's tone, although it was not unkind. "Listen to me. It is painfully clear to me that you are going through some serious shit right now. I know you probably don't want to talk about it, and I understand. But this isn't going to get better if I don't know how to help you. So you don't have to say anything now, but tonight we need to sit down and really talk."

"I-I don't k-know if I can-"

"I love you, Nee-san. I don't want you to hurt anymore. I will do whatever it takes to make your pain go away." Ryuko smiled warmly. Satsuki stared blankly at her sister for a moment. Suddenly she was aware of a faint moisture trailing down her face.

*I-I'm crying?* Realizing she had let her emotions slip, the older girl felt her resolve start to crack. Before she truly broke down, she buried her face into Ryuko's shoulder, who pulled her into a strong, loving hug.

“I-i-imouto-“ Satsuki whispered softly, sniffling as she tried to regain control of her breathing.

“It’s going to be okay, Nee-san.” Ryuko brushed a strand of hair out of Satsuki’s face as she looked down at her older sister. “I promise.” She placed a short, affectionate kiss on Satsuki’s forehead. “Now, let’s get back to our day out together!” Satsuki released the hug, having regained her composure. She sighed as she shifted in her seat, finally resting her head on her shoulder. Ryuko started up the car again as she heard Satsuki begin to snore softly.

*She must be tired. I gotta say, she does look beautiful, even like this-hmm? What? Was I just-Naaah, c’mon, Ryuko! You’re losin’ your touch!*

The younger girl brushed a hand through her messy locks as she glanced once more at the sleeping Satsuki. Suddenly, a laugh rose in her chest, and she chuckled to herself as she sped off towards the park. *Let’s have some fun today, Nee-san.*

***

Satsuki awoke to the wondrous sound of laughing children and chirping birds. Opening her eyes, she found herself surrounded by green grass, tall trees, playing children, and smiling parents. Feeling fingers stroking her own, she raised her head from its resting place against the park bench and looked over at her sister. Ryuko sat next to Satsuki in a relaxed position, one hand holding up Satsuki’s while the other hand gently moved back and forth across her fingers. When Ryuko noticed her siser had awoken and was staring at her, she quickly dropped the hand and cleared her throat, blushing.

“N-Nee-san! You’re awake! I-um-I didn’t want to wake you, so I kinda carried you to the bench…sorry…”

“It’s fine, Ryuko,” Satsuki smiled faintly. “It was pleasantly surprising to wake up to this-refreshing scenery.” Ryuko grinned back, running a hand through her hair.

“So, um, Satsuki,, I was-erm-I mean, I wanted to know-no, that’s not right-I was wondering-oh, nevermind,” Ryuko began blushing furiously and turned away, bowing her head to

obscure her face. Satsuki looked puzzled for a moment, then suddenly began blushing herself and turned away. Raising a hand to her lips, she found that she was smiling slightly.

*Is Ryuko…no. That can't be. It's just you imagination. She's probably just-*

"Well, look who it is!" A shrill voice pierced Satsuki's thoughts. "Fancy meeting you guys here!" Both sisters glanced up simultaneously at the people in front of them.

"Lady Satsuki!" Gamagori gasped, falling to one knee. "It makes me glad that you appear to be doing better." Sanageyama rolled his eyes.

"Hey, Matoi!" He smirked, folding his arms. "You takin' good care of your sister?"

"Better than you ever could," Ryuko teased, shoving him gently. Nonon laughed loudly.

"Ha! Serves you right, you stup-" Her taunts were cut short as the green-haired man tackled her with ease to the ground, her conductor's hat flying away. Gamagori bent to separate the tussling two as Inumuta nodded curtly at the two sisters, checking something on his PDA.

"I trust you two are doing well?" He asked, raising an electric blue eyebrow.

"O-of course," Satsuki blurted, glancing quickly at her sister before turning away again. Ryuko nodded, suddenly becoming fascinated with her shoes. A confused expression graced Inumuta's features for a moment before a booming voice interrupted.

"SILENCE! You two manic fools, we are in the presence of Lady Satsuki! Please, show some courtesy!" Gamagori shouted, holding Sanageyama and Nonon each with a massive arm. Sanageyama made a rude gesture as Nonon stuck out her tongue before both turned away. Inumuta rolled his eyes.

“So…what are you guys doing around here?” Ryuko questioned, careful to make her speech sound casual.

“We’re on our way to lunch together to celebrate Nonon getting accepted into one of the most prestigious musical academies in the country.” Satsuki nodded in surprise, although she knew deep down how skilled Nonon truly was.

“Well, it is a pleasure as always, Satsuki, but I suppose we should be going,” the blue-haired young man stated, checking the time on an amazingly thin blue watch. “We have to be on time after all.” He looked at his comrades for support, who shrugged and nodded. Satsuki sighed and Ryuko laughed. Both sisters waved as the Elites began to depart.

“See ya later!” Ryuko called after the retreating figures. Turning back to Satsuki, she suddenly remembered the awkward exchange they had had before the arrival of the four. “So Nee-san…ready to get going?”

“Y-yes, I-um-I think it’s about time we got something to eat as well.” Ryuko grinned as she stood up and dusted her hands.

“Good thing I went ahead and reserved a spot at a special little place Mako recommended,” she said more to herself than Satsuki, assuming a heroic stance with hands on hips. Satsuki rolled her eyes.

“Let’s just get going,” the older girl said, busying herself with adjusting her hair and clothes so she wouldn’t have to look her sister in the eye. Ryuko nodded, leading the way back to the car.

*Look, there she goes. Not a care in the world…how nice that must be. Too bad you know all too much about the real horror of the world. After all, you are one of the despicable creatures that are causing the world to rot…*

*Shut up. I won’t let you control my life or my thoughts anymore! Get out of my head!*

*Hmm. Silly girl. You really think that pretending to be brave will make me disappear? I am always with you. I never go away. I-*

*Wait. You're wrong.*

*What? Hahahahaha! You 're even crazier than I thought! Perhaps I'm doing a better job than I give myself credit for. Ryuko will abandon you as you spiral into your little-*

*No. When I'm with Ryuko…you go away! I just-I just need to-*

*No! I mean, no, that's not true! I am the voice that keeps you awake in the night! I am the monster in the dark! I am-*

"Ryuko! Wait! Please!" Ryuko paused mid-step and turned in time to see Satsuki stumble in her frantic run, falling forward towards the stone steps leading down out of the park.

Satsuki felt her feet trip up and her stomach drop as she fell forward towards the stairs. *Shit! Oh, fuck. I'm going to-*

Suddenly strong arms encircled her body, and gently brought her to a stop. Then Ryuko was clutching Satsuki to her chest tightly.

"It's okay Nee-san, I'm here for you. I'm here-" Satsuki looked up in surprise as Ryuko choked up. Suddenly she felt droplets of water on her face. "I-I-I…"

"Ryuko…"

"No! I almost lost you once! I refuse to let you get hurt again! Do you have any idea how fucking scared I was when I found you in the bathroom? ANY IDEA? Satsuki, I-" Ryuko couldn't finish her sentence as she broke down again, burying her face in her older sister's

hair. Unsure of what to do, she pulled Ryuko into a hug and whispered, rubbing soothing circles into her back.

“Imouto…I’m here for you t-t-too-“

***

John sighed contentedly. Today there had been a workplace hazard, and he got to get out of the office early. On rare occasions like this, John enjoyed walks in the park to see the scenery. However, today was a bit different. As he approached the familiar stone steps, he saw two women huddled in each others’ arms at the bottom of the stairs. They were embracing each other tightly, sobbing quietly into their arms. John smiled at the show of support and affection. He continued on his walk, thinking about the good things in the world.

# Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Emotions and consolations.

Chapter Notes

Whew! Another chapter done! Thanks for sticking with me, all of you! Studies are bogging me down, but I'm fording the river as best I can.

The sky was awash with brilliant hues of orange and purple as the two sisters pulled up to the boardwalk. After a very emotional afternoon full of silent comfort, they (as per Ryuko's suggestion) had gone for ice cream and lost track of the time as, in the privacy of their car, Satsuki suddenly began talking about her past for the first time.

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"When I was little, I would often ask…mother what had happened to my imouto," Satsuki paused, licking the remnants of melted ice cream from her fingertips before continuing. "She would always try to distract me and cleverly change the subject. Eventually, however, my-our-father told me a simplified version of the truth. Soon after, he "disappeared" tragically." Ryuko nodded, knees pulled up to her chest as she faced her sister in the passenger seat, listening intently.

"The…well…it all started about when I was eleven years old or so, and my body was, well, beginning to mature. She called it a "purification ritual." At first, I didn't know what was going on until she brought me out to the baths and told me to-to s-strip. I-I was afraid and unsure, but of course I couldn't disobey her. She got be into the bath, and then…and then s-she-" At this point, Satsuki was visibly shaking and had to pause for a moment to get her breathing under control. Ryuko tentatively reached out a hand, but Satsuki shook her head. "I-it's a-alright, Ryuko," she sniffled. "I have to get all this out." The former student council president took a deep breath before continuing.

“I-it was v-very uncomfortable for me at first. M-mother started out once a month, but it became more and more frequent, happening sometimes twice a week. Only once I left the house to go start up Honnouji did it become a monthly affair again. I-I s-s-still wasn’t strong e-enough to stand up to her, e-even then-“ Satsuki buried her head in her hands as she began to cry, her shoulders heaving up and down violently with silent sobs. Ryuko reached out without hesitation this time, enveloping her sister in a warm, comforting hug.

“Shh. It’s okay Nee-san. She can’t get to you anymore. I’m here for you.” Ryuko spoke softly as she rubbed the back of Satsuki’s neck soothingly. Sniffling and wiping her eyes, the older girl slowly looked up at her younger sister through teary eyes.

“I-I…d-didn’t…R-Ryuko!” she managed to choke out before feeling sobs rise in her throat again. Ryuko pressed a finger to Satsuki’s lips, hushing her.

“You don’t have to say anything. I understand how much of a monster Ragyo was. But now she can’t hurt anyone anymore,” the messy-haired girl smiled, brushing a stray strand of hair back behind Satsuki’s ear.

“I-I know, b-but she’s s-s-still in h-here-“ Satsuki moaned, jabbing a finger against her skull repeatedly. Suddenly she grabbed her head with both hands and began gripping it tightly. “She’s i-in my f-fucking head and I-I can’t get her o-out!” Ryuko looked sympathetically at her sister as she placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. Suddenly, she heard Satsuki’s breath catch in her throat and her sobs stop abruptly,

“Are you alright, sis?” Ryuko looked questioningly at her sister.

“Y-yeah, I’m fine,” Satsuki replied, turning away so Ryuko wouldn’t see the blush that overtook her face. *Whenever I’m near her, she seems to make Ragyo go away…* Her blush deepened as she pictured Ryuko’s caring gaze, so similar to the one from her dreams.

“Wow, I knew that Ragyo was a piece of shit, but-“ Ryuko grit her teeth as she pushed the thoughts away. *No point in ruminating on that now. Besides, Satsuki needs your support.* She sighed deeply, clenching her fists and calming herself. “Listen, how about we go walk along

the boardwalk together? There's that neat little amusement park, and we can enjoy the fresh air. Hmm?" Satsuki shook a little before slowly turning to face her sister.

"Y-yeah. I suppose I need to do something to calm down a little bit."

"Yes!" Ryuko fist-pumped, grinning. "Trust me Satsuki, You're gonna have fun. I'll make sure of it."

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Ryuko opened the car door and ran around to the other side, opening the door for Satsuki before the older girl had a chance to herself. She rolled her eyes.

"C'mon, Ryuko. I can do things myself, you know."

"Yeah, but you know I like to spoil you," Ryuko teased, grabbing Satsuki by the hand and dragging her lightly out of the car. Sighing, the taller sister followed.

"Well, what do you have planned for us tonight?" She asked, looking expectantly at Ryuko. The younger girl paused, thinking seriously for a moment.

"Actually, I just wanted to walk with you and enjoy the sunset," she admitted. "I know, sounds lame, but-"

"No," Satsuki interrupted. "In fact, it sounds…wonderful." As the two sisters stepped onto the old wooden planks lining the boardwalk as far as the eye could see, Satsuki subtly offered the crook of her elbow to Ryuko, hands in the pocket of her jacket. The messy-haired girl glanced down, back up, and down again before looking away and slowly sliding her arm into Satsuki's own, linking them together.

“You know,” Satsuki breathed, “I never thought I would actually ever talk to anyone about the…darker parts of my past. So…I guess what I’m trying to say is…thank you, Ryuko. For listening to me and understanding. For not judging me, and for-“ She stopped as a finger was pressed to her lips.

“Hey,” Ryuko smiled, “It’s what sisters do, right?” Satsuki nodded appreciatively and tightened her arm’s grim on Ryuko’s own slightly, smiling internally as the younger girl returned the gesture. The two continued on in silence for a little while, enjoying each others’ company as the cool ocean breeze caressed their cheeks and waved through their hair.

“Hey, look!” Ryuko pointed excitedly with her free hand. “The amusement park’s still open! C’mon sis, we gotta go!”

“Well, why not?” Satsuki surprised herself with her response. Normally, she couldn’t see herself, the great Kiryuin Satsuki, having fun at an amusement park. But now… “We never got to as kids, so I don’t see why not.”

“Sweet!” Ryuko chirped as she ran ahead, still careful not to pull her sister too much, as their arms were still linked. Once they approached the main gate, she slowed her pace to a walk once more. The man in the ticket booth smiled kindly at the siblings.

“Welcome. Admission is normally five dollars, but it’s not every day that I get to see sisters enjoying each others’ company. How about seven for the both of you?” Satsuki nodded gratefully as she handed the man several neatly creased bills with her free hand. The sisters looked around at the various booths and rides before turning to face each other. In that moment, both sisters silently agreed to let their restraints go and truly have fun. Running off, arm in arm, blinded by playful joy, they didn’t notice the large man and his short companion sitting off to the side on a bench.

“Hey! I never thought those two would get along so well,” Mako mused, chin and forearms resting on her partner’s head. He grunted in agreement.

“Yes, I am also pleased with the amount of “sisterly bonding” that has taken place.” Gamagori nodded serenely.

“Told ya they would be fine! Anyway, c’mon! We have a date to finish,” the petite girl grinned, leaning forward to plant a soft kiss on the giant’s forehead. Gamagori blushed deeply before standing, taking his girlfriend up in his massive arms and strolling out of the park.

***

Exhausted, satisfied, and fulfilled, Ryuko pillowed her head in her hands as she leaned back in the bench. Satsuki sighed in contentment as she rested her head on Ryuko’s shoulder and nestled into her side. Gazing up at the night sky, alight with the glow of the stars, both felt a certain unnamable significance in that moment.

Satsuki was the first to break the silence. “Thanks again for a wonderful day, imouto,” she said softly.

“No problem,” Ryuko replied. “It’s the least I could do to help you on your road to recovery. Satsuki blinked, suddenly realizing that she hadn’t had a recurrent thought about Ragyo all evening. Deciding to ignore it, she closed her eyes and pressed closer into her sister, her heart pounding at the closeness they shared in that instant in time. *I’m really never going to be able to tell her, am I?*

“You know,” Ryuko began, “This was probably one of the best nights I’ve had in a long time. And believe me when I say I’ve had some good nights.” Steeling her nerves, Satsuki made her decision.

“Ryuko,” she said, voice barely above a whisper, “can I tell you something?”

“Sure,” the younger girl replied. “Shoot.”

“No, I-I m-mean something really important.”

“Um, okay,” Ryuko sat up, turning to face Satsuki as she sat up as well. “You know already that you can tell me anything.”

Satsuki felt her face heating up as she willed herself to pick her head up and face her sister.

“I-I-I-um, thing is-I think I-“

“Hey. You don’t have to talk about it now, if you’re not ready.”

*But I have to! If I don’t now, I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to!*

“N-no, I c-can-“ Satsuki’s gaze fell again as she felt her confidence deflating. She felt a dull pain in her chest as she realized that, no matter how externally strong she was, however good a fighter she was, she wasn’t going to be able to confess her feelings to Ryuko. Never. “N-nevermind.”

“I understand,” Ryuko smiled gently, lifting Satsuki’s chin to face her. “But just remember that I will always be here if you need to talk.” With a quick kiss on the cheek, suddenly Ryuko was standing, stretching, and walking back towards the parking lot. She paused, turning back. “Hey. You coming, sis?”

“Yes.” Satsuki nodded, her voice coming out shaky and laden with emotion. She stood and followed Ryuko, feeling her heart sink. Looking up at the moon, surrounded by the brilliant shine of its starry companions, Satsuki let a single tear trace a wet path down her face as the celestial bodies cast their soft light down on the bittersweet evening.

# Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Suspense! Conflicts! Lions! Tigers! Bears! Croquettes?

Chapter Notes

Damn, it's been a long time. I guess my apologies are seeming a bit weak by now, and i guess you get the point. Hope you enjoy more of my amateur writing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ryuko hummed to her herself as she manipulated the skillet with ease, lightly tossing around the ingredients to produce yet another of those fluffy omelets that Satsuki had come to love. A delicate aroma filled the kitchen as she flipped the omelet onto a plate, topping it off with a dollop of a specially prepared hot sauce that was paste-like in consistency.

Deciding to surprise Satsuki, Ryuko crept down the hall, plate in hand, towards the bedroom of her sleeping sister. She cracked the door open gently, then opened it and walked in as she saw (to her slight disappointment) that Satsuki was already sitting up, writing in a notebook. Satsuki looked up and noticed Ryuko coming in, and blushed slightly as she snapped the notebook closed and slid it clandestinely back into her drawer.

“Ryuko!” She squeaked in an uncharacteristically meek tone. Clearing her throat and fighting back the heat that engulfed her cheeks, she continued. “I-I didn’t see you there.”

“Yeah, I thought I would surprise you by waking you up to breakfast, but I guess you’re already up, huh?” Ryuko grinned, offering the omelet, which Satsuki took, nodding in appreciation. She took her first delicate bite, sighing as the familiar flavors burst in her mouth.

“Thank you again, Ryuko. I do believe these get better every time, if that’s possible.”

“Hey,” the younger girl shrugged, “As long as it makes you happy, I’ll keep making them. And if they’re better every time…what can I say? I’m just a master chef.” Satsuki rolled her eyes as Ryuko laughed. Clearing her throat, she decided to bring up something that she had been thinking about since she woke up.

“Ryuko-can I ask you something?” Satsuki said tentatively.

“Sure thing,” Ryuko replied, flopping down on the bed next to Satsuki, who blushed again suddenly at the closeness and had to turn away to disguise it. The nights had become increasingly harder to bear, and although she would never admit it, Satsuki would often wait until Ryuko was asleep, and then stare at her longingly for what seemed like hours, as her mind would wander to…interesting thoughts. *How embarrassing. I really have fallen far, haven’t I? Once the invincible Kiryuin Satsuki; now turned timid girl with a high school crush.* She took a deep breath before continuing.

“D-do you think-do you find it-weird that we s-share the same bed, even though we’re sisters? I mean, younger girls do it, but we’re older now. I-I don’t mean to-“

“I don’t see anything unusual about it,” Ryuko said, tilting her head slightly. I mean, sisters do it all the time, right? And the way I see it, we’re making up for those years we missed together. Plus, as long as it helps you, I’d be willing to do anything.”

“Yes, well-“ Satsuki sighed. “It has definitely chased my…nightmares away, and I do truly think it is due to your presence. However…” She trailed off, mentally slapping herself again but knowing that this was a barrier she wouldn’t be able to pass.

“Hmm?” Ryuko asked, placing a hand gently on Satsuki’s own. “Go ahead, you don’t have to hold back.”

Satsuki’s brows furrowed as she struggled to find her voice again.

“N-no, Ryuko, t-this is something that I-I don’t know i-if I can-“

“Sats, you trust me, right? I don’t think there’s any reason that-“

“It’s just-er, no, I-I don’t-I can’t-Ryuko, I don’t know what’s happening to me!” She spouted suddenly, causing Ryuko to jump in surprise slightly. Although she had seen much more of the expressive, emotional side of her sister, she could never completely get used to it.

“C’mon Nee-san, you know that-“

“No!” Satsuki shouted a bit louder than she meant to, causing Ryuko to wince slightly. “Look Ryuko, I don’t know what I’m feeling right now. I want to tell you something, but I can’t. It’s really hurting me to keep this inside, but something is telling be that you’re the cause of all this. I…I think I need some time away from you to sort out my thoughts.” She finished, holding her breath and closing her eyes.

“But, don’t you think that-“

“No! I’m really sorry Ryuko, and I don’t expect you to understand something that I don’t myself, but I think I need to be…away from you for a while.” Satsuki’s heart was pounding like a jackhammer as she finished.

“Satsuki, I think it’s best if-“

“Ryuko! Please listen to me for once! Just go! Get out! Please just go!”

Ryuko exhaled deeply and slowly, causing Satsuki to open her eyes again suddenly. The younger girl swallowed the lump beginning to form in her throat before nodding.

“I-I understand, Satsuki. If you need time, I guess you should take the space you need. I-I’ll be going, I guess,” she smiled sadly, standing up and walking out before Satsuki could say

anything. Once in the hallway, she slumped up against the wall, sliding down to the floor and putting her head in her hands.

"I thought-I thought I was helping her this whole time, not making it worse for her," she said to no one in particular. "I guess not."

Swallowing her pain, Ryuko stood and walked to the front door. *Some fresh air ought to do me good.* She turned her head towards Satsuki's hallway before shaking her head and closing the door behind her.

Satsuki sat stunned on the bed, a pang of regret aching in her chest as her fists gripped the blanket tightly to her. *Fuck.* A single word was the only coherent thought the tall woman was able to form before her raw emotion took over and reduced her to a sobbing heap on the mattress.

***

*BANG! BANG! BANG!* The heavy fusillade of knocks rang out one last time before, growing worried and impatient, Gamagori murmured his apologies before bashing down the hardwood doors with a powerful blow. As he tried to carefully prop the door back up, the other members of the Elites looked around at each other and their surroundings in confusion.

"I thought…wasn't Ryuko supposed to meet us at the door? Unless the surprise lunch isn't a surprise anymore…" Inumuta mused, looking at the others, who shrugged.

"It's not like Matoi to forget something when it comes to Satsuki," Nonon frowned. "Something's up. It doesn't look like anyone's here."

"Well, only one way to find out," Sanageyama said before walking down one of the manor's long hallways. "Matoi! Satsuki-sama! Anyone here?"

“He does have the right idea,” Gamagori mumbled. “We should try to find them. Perhaps Lady Satsuki is in trouble again…” The others nodded in agreement before splitting up to search.

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Satsuki grinned humorlessly to herself as she watched the last of the crimson ribbons mix with the water and slide down the drain. Her sobs finally subsiding, the tall girl stood and turned off the water. She stared down, as she always did, at the new red lines among their faded brethren before placing the case of razors in its new hidden location behind the ventilation grate. *Ryuko may have gotten the others, but she couldn't-couldn't-* Just as a fresh cry rose in Satsuki's throat, she became aware of the footsteps echoing throughout her bedroom. Quietly wrapping her towel around herself, she pressed her ear to the bathroom door.

“Satsuki? Are you in here? C'mon, please come out! We're all here, and we're worried about you. I'll explain why we're here if you give me the chance,” Nonon's familiar voice had lost its normally cynical and sarcastic quality and was full of genuine concern.

*I-I should go out there and talk,* Satsuki told herself. *They need to know I'm a-alright.*

*Oh, but you can't. Just look at yourself. Look at your arms. You can't possibly face them after doing that to yourself. They'd be disgusted. No one wants to help a broken little girl!*

*N-no…t-that's not t-true…Ryuko s-said-*

*But Ryuko's not here right now, is she? No, she left you! You weren't good enough for her. I told you she'd leave you eventually-*

“No! Stop! Shut up!” Satsuki was unaware of the shouts outside the bedroom as she shouted and gripped her head. This time, Inumuta carefully picked the lock of the bathroom door after calling out Satsuki's name several times without response.

The Elites entered the room to find a weeping Satsuki curled in a fetal position on the floor, hands firmly gripping the sides of her head.

"Please stop," she was whispering to a seemingly invisible person. "Please go away."

"Don't just stand there! Ira, put her on the bed. One of you two idiots call Ryuko," Nonon ordered, and Inumuta quickly obliged. Gamagori gently lifted Satsuki over to her bed as Sanageyama and Nonon examined her self-inflicted wounds.

"Shit," the green-haired man grimaced as he brushed his fingers lightly across the deep cuts, pulling back when Satsuki's whispers were interrupted by a pained hiss.

"C'mon and help me over here, monkey," Nonon called. "Satsuki's medicine shit is everywhere! Where's the fucking antiseptic?" Sanageyama ran over to his pink-haired friend and they began their search. Gamagori placed a large hand on Inumuta's shoulder as they both stood in solemn silence, until the blue-haired man's call finally got through.

***

"Um…hello?" Ryuko's voice came through the phone hesitantly. "In-Inumuta? What's up? Oh, shit! I forgot about the surprise lunch we had planned for Sa-"

"Matoi, we've had a bit of a…problem," he replied tentatively. "I-I think you should come over here as soon as possible."

"Where are you?" Ryuko's voice was already becoming shaky as she prepared for the worst. Before Inumuta was finished responding she was already sprinting back to her motorbike. *Satsuki…*

***

“Matoi? Matoi?! Dammit!” The normally composed man flung his phone into the wall in frustration before slumping to the ground. Gamagori looked at him with concern and confusion. “I-I lost her. Hopefully she’s on her way…” He glanced over his shoulder at the huddled form of their mistress on the bed. “Maybe we should call the hospital…”

“I believe that is not necessary,” the large man replied. “It seems the others are tending to her wounds. The question is, how much emotional damage has Lady Satsuki endured?” They watched as Nonon and Sanageyama delicately dressed and wrapped the angry red fissures in their mistress’s arm.

“Uhh…M…” Satsuki’s incessant whispering had stopped, and all four heads in the room turned towards her. “I…wha-R-Ryuko?”

“She’s on her way, don’t worry. Hang in there,” Nonon said to her long-time friend, rubbing her shoulder comfortingly.

“NO!” Satsuki yelled with a strength that surprised even her. She looked around at her shocked friends before sinking back into the mattress. “S-sorry. Just please, d-don’t l-let Ryuko come h-here right now. Please.”

“I-um-I’m afraid she may be here already,” Inumuta said, looking out the window in the hallway at the motorbike racing up the winding path to the manor. Suddenly, Satsuki sat up, pushing away her friends’ hands as they tried to get her to lay down. Without a word she pulled a large suitcase from under her bed and opened it, examining the contents. Satisfied, she closed it with a snap, and stripped off her towel before walking over to her closet. The males of the Four averted their gaze as Nonon went over to the taller woman.

“Satsuki, what are you doing?” The shorter woman asked, watching as her mistress dress in a practical yet stylish shirt, mid-length skirt, and jacket. “You can’t just-“

“Nonon. Please. Trust me,” Satsuki asked, pausing in her dressing to give her old friend a meaningful gaze. “I’m doing what I…what I need to do. T-tell Ryuko that…I-I went to f-find my o-own spa-space,” she murmured, choking up on the last few words. Nonon opened her mouth to object, then closed it, finally nodding.

“Alright Satsuki. Just promise me that you’ll call if you’re in need.” Satsuki nodded gratefully as she gathered her suitcase and handbag, slipping on her ususal white pumps and walking to the door. Looking as if she forgot something, she carried her handbag into the bathroom, where she closed the door and retrieved her razors, stuffing them deep into the bag. Walking back into her bedroom, the former Student Council President turned to her friends and former subordinates.

“T-thank you all for being here for me,” Satsuki smiled in gratitude, bowing deeply and shaking her head as the Elites bowed back. “I know everything is confusing, and it’s confusing for me too. I promise to come back as soon as I’ve figured out everything for myself-“

*KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!* The loud bangs on the door jolted Satsuki, who bowed her head one last time before running down the hall and out the back door. The Elites stood motionless, exchanging glances before heading to the front door together. As Inumuta reached for the doorknob, a boot-clad foot burst through, knocking the already unhinged doors to the floor. Gamagori made a mental note to fix them later.

“Where is she?!” Ryuko shouted, eyes burning with a sort of crazed energy that was angry, passionate, and terrified at the same time. As the Elites once again exchanged looks, unsure of how to answer, Ryuko snorted angrily and stormed off to Satsuki’s room. Finally coming to her wits, Nonon ran after the brooding young woman.

Ryuko entered the bedroom in time to watch Satsuki’s spare car pull out of the rear driveway and race down the road. She turned on Nonon furiously.

“Matoi, listen, I-“

“WHERE. THE. FUCK. DID. SHE. GO?!” Ryuko screamed in the shorted girl’s face, who raised her arms in a nervous shrug. Sighing angrily and sadly, the dark-haired woman collapsed on her sister’s bed. *Fuck. Sats, what are you doing?*

Nonon sighed as she sat down next to Ryuko.

“Listen, Matoi. I know we haven’t always seen eye to eye, but I think that for once Satsuki is doing what is probably best for the both of you. I don’t have the full story, but-“

“What do *you* know? I’ve been living with her for the past-“

“Ryuko, you need to get a grip. Please. I’m not saying this to be fucking harsh now. You need to get your shit together before you can start worrying about your sister. I’m worried too. I don’t know what’s going to happen. But for now I think it’s best if we focus on us. Just hear me out.” Ryuko sat in silence for a while before nodding. Finally she sat up, and to Nonon’s surprise, placed her head in the smaller girl’s lap.

“I guess Satsuki really is a big goddamn mystery,” Ryuko said.

“Yeah, no kidding,” Nonon sighed.

“Listen, Nonon, t-t-thanks,” the taller girl said. “I really do appreciate your…advice.”

“Sure thing,” the pink-haired girl replied. “She’s my friend too, after all.”

***

Sanageyama stared intently at the ivory white chess piece in front of him for what seemed like hours before finally moving his king confidently, dusting his hands. Inumuta raised an eyebrow as if to say, ‘*are you sure?’* before moving his jet-black queen into position.

“Checkmate.” The blue-haired man smirked. “I believe that makes 10 games?”

“Gah! Fuck this game,” Sanageyama sighed. “Are the other two still in that room?”

“I believe so,” Inumuta replied, watching as Gamagori drilled the screws for the new hinges in place.

“Mako should be here soon to help out, in case you two are hungry,” Gamagori said without looking up from his work.

“Hm. I haven’t had one of those croquettes in a while. She does make them just as well as her mother does,” Inumuta grinned as he remembered the mysterious fried food.

“Well, go see if they’re done talking or whatever. I’m gonna see what ingredients we have for a meal. I hope Makanshoku gets here soon.” He stood and went to the kitchen without waiting for a response.

“Typical.” The shorter man snorted. “Ira, I’m going to check on the others,” he called to his large friend before walking down the wide hallway. Inumuta paused before knocking, wondering if he was interrupting something important. *Hopefully they’re done with serious conversations and whatnot.* His knuckles rapped the door lightly three times.

“Come in,” Nonon’s shrill voice echoed from within. *She sounds upset,* the blue-haired man thought as he opened the door. Inside, he was surprised to find Nonon sitting on Satsuki’s bed cross-legged, a sleeping Ryuko’s head across her lap.

“Um-“

“Shut it, dog,” she cautioned. “She just fell asleep while we were talking. Fuck, I’m tired. What have you been up to?”

“Well, you know,” he replied, “kicking our dear monkey’s ass in chess. Ira fixed the door, and I think Makanshoku’s on her way over to help out with dinner.”

“Good, because I’m hungry. I wonder what the underachiever will think about all this?” Inumuta simply shrugged and sat down next to his pink-haired friend, trying to sort out everything that had transpired in the past few hours for himself.

“We sure have changed, haven’t we?”

“Yeah, and I don’t know if I like it,” Nonon sighed. “Look at me. I’m fucking soft!” Inumuta grinned and gave her a friendly punch in the shoulder.

“And to think you and Matoi hated each other only a few months ago,” he said, looking down at the sleeping girl. Nonon opened her mouth to reply, but instead found herself trying and failing to suppress a yawn. Inumuta smirked before suddenly yawning himself, fatigue settling on his whole body.

“Don’t worry, I won’t fall asl-“ Nonon managed before she collapsed onto the bed. The blue-haired man only nodded weakly before following suit.

***

Satsuki settled down in her seat, still somewhat distracted as she stared out the window at the rain beginning to fall.

*Well, it seems you finally got the message. Good riddance, huh? I’m sure Ryuko doesn’t even miss you, you worthless piece o-*

*Stop. Please just stop. I get the point. Just let me have some peace for now, okay?*

*Hm. Don’t fret, my dear. I’ll be back soon enough.*

The dark-haired woman sighed sadly as she chased the voice away yet again. *Ryuko-I’m sorry…* The plane jerked sharply, indicating that they would be moving soon. Satsuki lay back and closed her eyes, preparing for the long flight to America. *Time to figure my life out. And if that means I have to begin a new one, then so be it.*

***

The rain played its rhythm on the plane’s shell and the Kiryuin Manor’s windows alike as two sisters slept, distance between them growing ever greater.

Chapter End Notes

Again, as always, sorry for the chapters growing later and later. I don't want to bring my personal stuff into my writing, but I've hit a point where I'm losing...life motivation, as it were. Still, I'll try my best, as I really want to finish this story. Thanks for sticking with me!

# Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> Goddammit, I said I'd finish this chapter, and I did. Took a long time and a lot of smacking myself to do it, but it's done. I'll still be working on this, and I really do want to finish it. But as you've seen here, it may take ages. Years, even. But thank you again to everyone who's stuck with me on this one. It means so much.

Snow twinkled in the glow of artificial light as it drifted softly downwards to the pavement below. Winter was starting, and Satsuki could hardly remember when she last had time to appreciate its beauty, what with all the planning for Honnouji.

*But Honnouji's a thing of the past now. All that hard work, all those years I spent throwing away my life…but it was worth it in the end. I stopped Ragyo-*

*Stopped who? Forgotten about me already? I thought we both knew that I'm always with you, and always will be.*

*You know what I mean. Leave me alone, I'm trying to think.*

*Oh, my dear child, you know that I'm not just going to-*

Satsuki grabbed her headphones, which lay next to her bed, and put them on. Soon the soothing tunes drowned out the voice of her mother and she leaned up against the back of the chair in relief as she continued staring out the window.

It had been a month since she had left home, and she hadn't contacted any of the Four, Mako, or Ryuko in any way. Of course, they all tried to contact her, but she ignored their calls, texts, and emails.

*I have work I need to do,* she told herself. *I don't have time for them right now. I need to decide for myself what I'm feeling.*

But deep down, Satsuki was aware that she was avoiding her situation and her friends. However, she did legitimately have work regarding her new life in America. After landing in the United States, she had searched for a short time before finally finding a job that was just enough (with some borrowed funds from the Kiryuin Estate) to afford a run-down apartment and other basic living expenses.

The owner of a small, local bookstore had offered to let her help out around the store, an offer she gladly accepted. While it didn't pay very well, Satsuki was glad to have a job at all, as she didn't want to rely on the estate to pay for everything. While a broken girl, she did still have enough pride left to forge her own path without relying on her mother's money. It sickened her to even consider using it, although she already had on numerous occasions.

The apartment where the former Student Council President lived was very small, smaller than her mansion bedroom back in Japan. It contained a modest kitchen, a sofa bed and TV, a hallway closet, and a coffee table barely large enough to fit two people. Though not optimal conditions, it was what Satsuki could afford, and she had no complaints.

Sighing as she hugged her knees to her chest, Satsuki again reflected on everything she wished she had done differently back at home. Hindsight is 20/20, as they say. Looking down at her arms, she chuckled humorlessly as she imagined a topographical map of the mountains and valleys of scars. The young woman wore long sleeves whenever she left her apartment to hide what looked like the aftermath of a tiger attack. So many new ones had been added since she arrived in America, especially with the return of Ragyo's voice.

*Ryuko, I'm going to f-figure this out s-someday, and I-I'll be back!* Somehow, her mental cries sounded impotent and useless. Satsuki's hand rose to her face to discover, to her surprise, fresh tears slowly tracing paths down her cheeks. Slowly rising from her chair and removing her headphones, the tall woman changed into her nightgown and crawled into the uncomfortable sofa bed.

*Sweet dreams. I'll see you there.* The sickeningly-sweet, all-too-familiar voice was becoming more and more a constant presence in her life.

*Please leave me alone, just this once.*

*Ha. Haha. Hahahaha! Idiot.*

*Please, j-jus-j-zzzzzzzz.*

***

*Pain. Cold. Dark. Touch. Bad. Stop. Mother. Don't! Please! RYUKO!!!*

***

Again and again they plagued her. Ever since the first night away from Ryuko, the nightmares returned to Satsuki with a vengeance. She had no one to go to now, no friends to talk to, no one to get advice from. She'd considered seeing a doctor or therapist, but she had nowhere near the financial means required to do so. And of course, she wouldn't want her mother's money helping her escape, well, her mother.

And so, as she stepped into the shower, naked as the day she was born, Satsuki practiced the only therapy she had ever known, save for Ryuko's presence. Left, right, left, right. Red clouds, red ribbons, red rain. Wash, rinse, dry, dress, bandage. Repeat cycle, day in, and day out. Real estate was becoming increasingly sparse, what with new inhabitants taking every last inch of space from shoulder to wrist on the daily. Satsuki had eventually relented, and used her legs as well. In time, they too had already begun to look as if she'd been blasted with shrapnel. *What would Ryuko say? She'd hate me. She'd never talk to me again. I failed to stay strong. I'm too weak for someone like her.*

*Yes. You are indeed, my beloved. Now don't let me stop you, I'm quite enjoying this spectacle.*

Satsuki gritted her teeth and blocked out the voice to the best of her ability as she dried off, dressed and prepared for work. With an apple and bagel in hand she was out the door, and starting the 10-mile walk to work. Even a taxi didn't fit into the strict budget she was on. A

bicycle was also beyond her budget, although with the money she set aside each week, it could become reasonable in another two or three months. The dark-haired woman glanced at her watch.

*5:30. I'm still on time.* Nodding to herself, Satsuki picked up her pace. She passed through the familiar streets and glanced around at the commuters going about their morning routines, so early it was still dark out. Taxis whizzed past and horns honked in the rush to work. While it was something Satsuki hadn't been used to at first, she had grown accustomed to it. It amazed the tall woman that the streets and sidewalks could be so busy during the early hours of the day. *Well, this is a city after all, no different from Tokyo.*

Within the hour she arrived at the bookstore. Walking in, Satsuki heard the familiar ding of the bell and waved to her boss, who had just come out of the back room.

"Good morning, Satsuki! Up bright and early, as always," the elderly Asian woman smiled as she greeted the younger girl. Satsuki look puzzled as she tried to sort out the English. Her reading and listening abilities far surpassed her speaking ability. While Ragyo had insisted on her taking English lessons as a child, Satsuki had despised them and forgotten most of the teachings. Now in America, some of it was starting to come back to her.

"Th-thank…ya…yu…you," Satsuki replied carefully, in painstakingly drawn-out words. "H-how ah-a…am I du-doing?" Her boss laughed.

"Don't worry, Satsuki. You're doing fine," she said in perfect Japanese. "It's nice to see your English is improving."

"Thank you, Chief," the taller woman smiled back, grateful to have a kind boss, and one that spoke Japanese, no less. Walking into the back room, Satsuki returned with two large boxes full of new arrivals. She set them down on the floor before removing books, stamping library stickers on them, and sorting them on the shelves.

The bell on the door jingled once more, and the store was filled with voices and laughter as customers streamed inside. The workday had begun. The old woman's eyes gleamed with energy as she began to shout orders at her employees. Satsuki smiled, happy to feel useful again. *It's like I'm back at…at Honnouji again. Back when Ryuko*-Choking up slightly, the former Student Council President reminded herself that she had work to do.

***

"Thanks, Chief," Satsuki smiled at her boss as she left work for the day. The other few employees of the store spilled out behind her, all heading their respective directions to get home. The dark-haired girl shoved her hands into her coat pockets, exhaling a drawn-out breath that misted in the cold. Frigid air stung Satsuki's cheeks as she strolled down the empty sidewalk. Like magic, the perpetually busy streets resembled a ghost town at night.

*Sure is some beautiful weather,* she remarked, looking at the snow-topped leaves and the fresh flakes descending around light fixtures. As work got out late during the week, the only visible light save for the moon came from the lampposts, high above the ground. As Satsuki came within a mile of her house, she began to feel an odd presence.

*It's not-no, it's really not Ragyo this time…I think…*

Turning her head back over one shoulder than the other, she found nothing out of the ordinary. However, the numerous dark alleyways to her immediate right would provide excellent cover-*for an assassin? No, I don't have someone who hates me that much right now, right? Then who-WHAM!*

Satsuki barely had time to think as a hand came seeming out of nowhere, slamming her head into the side of the brick building she was walking past.

"Fuck!" The tall woman shouted audibly, grasping the side of her head in surprise and pain. Still stunned, she was unable to react when strong hands grabbed her under her arms and unceremoniously threw her facedown into the nearest alleyway. "Wha-"

Before she could turn around, both her arms were twisted behind her back and held in place with a vise-like grip. Another hand held the back of her neck, forcing her left cheek into the ground.

“Shhh,” a male voice hushed her. “Just shut the fuck up and I won’t hurt you, alright?” Satsuki screeched in indignant fury as the hand behind her neck released its grip quickly and grabbed the waistband of her pants, shoving them to her ankles in one swift motion before returning to her throat. The man standing above her slammed a foot into her right temple. “What’d I just fucking tell you, stupid bitch?!”

Tears began flowing down Satsuki’s cheeks as the situation dawned on her. The hand released her neck once more as it tore down her panties. She heard the man fumbling with his pants as his hand gave her right ass cheek a firm smack. Satsuki bit her tongue so as not to cry out.

*No! No! Nononono! Please help me, this can’t be-AACCK*

Satsuki felt her body involuntarily spasm as the man’s cold fingers prodded her opening.

“Well fuck, I didn’t expect this one to still be a virgin,” he said more to himself than anyone.

*No please Ryuko please help me I don’t want to do this I don’t I don’t I DON’T-*

*Do what you have to, dear. You’re already a murderer anyways. Ah, this brings back memories. Memories of when we used to bathe together-*

*SHUT UP! FUCK YOU! I’LL DO WHAT I WANT AND YOU CAN’T-AAAHHHHH*

The man chuckled loudly as he thrust his forefinger halfway into Satsuki, before pulling it back out just as quickly. Satsuki squeezed her eyes shut as tightly as possible in a futile attempt to ignore the gross violation.

*Do it. DO IT. DO IT! MAKE ME PROUD, SATSUKI! MAKE YOUR MOTHER PROUD!!!*

*N-n-no…I-I d-don’t want to…be l-like you-*

As the fingers traced a circle gently around Satsuki's exposed hole, she clenched her teeth, bracing herself before shrieking at the top of her lungs. The hand withdrew and raised in a fist, aimed straight at her head.

"You little piece of shit, I told you-" He didn't have time to finish. As soon as his hand first left Satsuki's body, her legs corkscrewed up from the floor, snagging the man's raised arm and bringing him to the ground. With her now-freed arms, she grabbed his other wrist, twisting and breaking it in one fell swoop. Flexing her legs, the able-bodied woman snapped her rapist's other arm right at the elbow, causing him to howl in pain. Blind rage now coursing through her body, Satsuki grabbed one of the man's legs, stepping on his thigh while pulling his foot upwards. At this point all that remained in the man's eyes was fear. "Please, miss, I didn't mean to-" Satsuki caught his frightened eyes with her own malevolent ones.

"You might want to watch where you stick your fucking dick next time, then," she snarled, snapping his leg. As he screamed in terror and pain (and confusion, as he didn't speak Japanese), two well-placed kicks to his chest shattered his ribcage. Satsuki knelt on his broken chest and raised her fist over the man's face for a killing strike, when she saw the raw fear in his eyes and what she was doing dawned on her. Instantly all the fight left her. Her fist dropped to her side as she rose slowly.

*Fuck. I let my-FUCK! I-I-I could've killed him! I'm no better than Ragyo! FUCK! She con-controlled me!*

*Run, my dear. Run, before someone comes looking. Unless you* want *to be punished, you naughty girl-*

Tears beginning to flow anew, Satsuki stooped to grab her clothes before sprinting out of the alleyway.

***

"So, this is America," Nonon said as the plane began to taxi towards the gate. "And somewhere out there, our mistress awaits."

“Goddammit, can’t this fucking plane move any faster?!” Ryuko exclaimed angrily from beside her pink-haired companion, drawing glances ranging from confused to annoyed from their fellow passengers.

“Shhh! Matoi, I get that you’re worried, and I am too. But we can’t be impatien-“

“I’m not gonna be scolded by a fucking eight-year-old,” the wild-haired woman growled, folding her arms under her breasts and closing her eyes. Nonon sighed heavily.

*How did I get myself into this shit?* The shorter girl thought, remembering the long process in finding Satsuki.

Inumuta, with all his technical genius, had less-than-legally accessed Japanese and American flight records and found more-or-less where Satsuki had originally landed in America. From there, he and Gamagori extensively reviewed hours of security footage from buildings in the area before finally getting a fix on Satsuki’s workplace. However, the small bookstore seemed to be nowhere near Satsuki’s place of residence, and there were many holes in camera coverage. Not to mention that people would start to get suspicious if the footage records were accessed too much. So Nonon had been sent to confront Satsuki at work, or to find out where she was staying. Ryuko had argued, reasoned, and threatened her way into accompanying Nonon on the trip, although the Elite Four unanimously agreed it was a bad idea. Ryuko’s emotions regarding the situation were too unstable, yet she insisted that she go with Nonon. The Four had finally relented, under the condition that Nonon be able to have time to talk with Satsuki before Ryuko confronted her sister.

“This is your captain speaking. The time is now ten o’ clock in the morning, and we have arrived at the gate. Please remember to gather all of your belongings before disembarking. We hope you enjoyed flying with us,” the voice on the intercom crackled slightly as it relayed the pilot’s message.

“Hey, troll, what’d that just say?” Ryuko asked, glancing over at the younger girl.

“Don’t call me ‘troll.’ I have a name, you know,” Nonon rolled her eyes. “It was the pilot. He said something about it being ten in the morning, and he thanked us for our patronage or

whatever. Didn't you take English lessons as a kid?"

"No, not all of us are privileged and spoiled like you. My dad spent too much time on his research anyways," the taller girl spat back.

"Listen, I didn't want you on this trip. None of us did. But we let you come. You could at least show me a little respect-"

"Shut up! You only let me come because I threatened to trash your music collection!"

"You have NO RIGHT to lay your troglodyte hands on such classical masterpieces!" Nonon screeched back.

"Ahem," a voice above the seated girls cleared its throat, before continuing in English. "Could you save your argument for after you've gotten of the plane? I don't know what it's about, but we're all tired and don't want to hear it."

"What did he say? What did he FUCKING SAY?" Ryuko hissed.

"He said…to take our or-no, that's not it-ar-argument outside," Nonon translated after a moment of thought.

"Tell him to go fuck himself," Ryuko said, before collapsing back against her seat. Nonon made an exasperated noise. This was going to be some task.

***

*Drip. Drip. Drip. Plop! Drip. Drip. Drip. Plop!*

Red, white, red, white. Satsuki's vision was blurring so much that it was hard to distinguish even the stark contrast between blood and white ceramic shower floor. Her hand shook so badly as she pressed down to make the next cut that it looked like a two-year-old had a seizure whilst drawing a line. The once-strong woman let her fingers go limp, the source of her salvation dropping from her grasp to the floor with a metallic clang. Satsuki brought her hands up to cover her face as she wept.

*Why? Why? WHY?! Why am I such a fucking idiot? Why was so stupid?! Why was I fucking clueless enough to almost let myself be* raped*? And why did I lose control like that?!*

*I bet you know exactly why, darling. Come, let mother soothe you*-Satsuki sharply brought the razor blade across her thigh, cutting off the voice temporarily. As soon as she had gotten home, Ragyo began to run rampant around her head, and this was her immediate course of action. To bleed herself dry. To create linear artwork from her flesh. And now, to her horror, she was beginning to realize that it wasn't enough. Damaged nerve endings no longer provided her with the sharp pain that drowned out the serpentine voice. And so, she had purchased several bottles of alcohol, ranging from light beer to very strong liquor. *As a...fallback plan,* she had told herself, well aware of the addictive nature of the substance as she had shown her ID to the cashier. But now, the only thing on her mind was pushing the pain, the sheer agony, out of her being.

Stumbling out of the shower, her vision cloudy from blood loss, Satsuki used the wall for support on her way to the kitchen. She opened the top cabinet above the sink, extracting two bottles, one vodka and one whiskey. Once seated on her uncomfortable mattress, the tall woman uncapped the whiskey bottle and took a large gulp. The brownish fluid hit the back of her throat with a burning splash, liquid fire sliding down her throat and settling in her stomach, leaving a pungent taste in her mouth. After two more swigs she began to feel it, at first dull warmth seeping in from the edges of her consciousness, becoming a more enveloping comfort as she drank more. With a third of the bottle down, Satsuki couldn't hear a trace of the voice, or even remember its existence.

Sleepiness began to creep up around the corners of her eyes, willing them to close. At first fighting, Satsuki realized she had no reason to stay awake. Still bleeding on her otherwise stark white sheets, her breath reeking of alcohol, the former Student Council President fell backwards on the sofa bed, beginning to snore softly the moment her head hit the pillow.

***

“So, this is the place, huh? ‘Books and Other Literature?’”

“I don’t fucking know. You’re the one with all the info, dumbass,” Ryuko snorted.

“Right. I forgot that you aren’t trustworthy enough to know this-uh-sensitive data,” Nonon hastily replied.

“I don’t care about that. I just wanna find Satsuki. Besides, what kind of a name for a bookstore is ‘Books and Other Literature?’” Ignoring her companion’s rhetorical question, Nonon pushed open the door, leading the way inside.

“Ah! Hello! Welcome to my humble store. How may I help you?” An elderly Asian woman sat behind the desk, and she stood up as her patrons entered, walking over to meet them.

“Um, does a certain Satsuki Kiryuin work here?” Nonon asked, remembering that Americans reversed their first and last names.

“Well, dear, why do you ask?” The woman replied, understandable caution in her voice.

“She’s a-very dear friend of ours, like an older sister to me, and an actual older sister to my friend here. She ran away from her home in Japan several months ago, and we haven’t been able to contact her since-“ Pausing, Nonon realized the two had been speaking in her native tongue the whole time. “You speak Japanese?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” The woman chuckled heartily. “It is the language of my homeland, after all. I speak English as well, if you wish to continue in-“

“No-“ Ryuko interrupted, before stopping herself. With an apparent herculean effort she continued politely. “I-I a-apologize for m-my rudeness-“ Her face grew redder with every word, as did Nonon’s smirk. “I would l-like to p-partic-no, that’s a dumb thing to say, Ryuko-er, ah, screw it. I don’t speak English and I want to know what you’re saying.”

“Why didn’t you just say so?” The woman smiled, before growing more somber. “Yes, a young woman named Kiryuin Satsuki works here, but she’s always upbeat and ready to work. Never falters, always on the mark. Come to think of it, she’s late today for the first time-“ Both younger women looked at each other, eyes widening.

“Where does she live?” Nonon asked, urgency in her tone causing her voice to waver.

“I-I don’t know. I’ve never really had a need to know where my employees live. If it helps, she’s always the last one out of the store besides myself, and when I wave to her, she always heads east. There’s a large apartment complex there, very affordable. I hope that’s helpful-“

“Thank you so much,” Ryuko blurted out, dashing forward to shake the woman’s hand before sprinting out the door. Nonon sighed and bowed to the woman.

“Excuse Matoi. She still retains all the immaturity of childhood, while her sister is-was-a paragon of maturity. I guess it’s a balancing act-ah, I better give chase. Thank you for the help.” With that, the pink-haired girl was out the door, and soon engaged in a shouting match with Ryuko. The elderly woman smiled once more as she heard a motorcycle start up and speed into the distance. *Godspeed, children.*

***

Satsuki awoke with a pounding headache, a mouth drier than the Sahara, and the worst nausea of her life to the sound of a motorcycle screeching to a halt outside her apartment building. *What the fuuuuuuuck…* was the only coherent thought she could form. Trying to sit up and peer out the window, her stomach lurched and suddenly what seemed like a meal from eons past was pooling in her lap, on her sofa bed, and at her feet.

“Shith,” Satsuki said plainly around a second mouthful of vomit. With a painful heave she managed to get to her feet and stumble her way to the kitchen sink before heaving again. After leaving a sizable mess in the sink basin, still gripping the counter, Satsuki tried to focus her pounding head on what to do. *C-clean…mess…*

Struggling to keep her nausea down, the dark-haired woman stumbled her way into the bathroom, wincing at the bright artificial light that sent spikes of pain through her skull. Suddenly she felt a surge rising from her stomach, and she knelt at the toilet bowl just in time before the floodgates were opened once more. *Make it stop,* she mentally pleaded with no one, before emptying her insides. Once the vomiting had finally died down to dry heaving, she collapsed backwards onto the bathroom floor, her puke drying on her clothes and the floor. Too miserable to even move, she coughed once before falling asleep again.

***

"But this is the place, right? This has got to be the place! We've been looking for five fucking hours, and this is the last place in the area!"

"Calm down, Ryuko. I don't know any more than you do. There's only one way to find out." Nonon rolled her eyes, just as frustrated and fed up as her companion. Both shuffling to the entrance with the telltale stooped posture of dejected, defeated enterprisers, she reached for the push handle, when, to her surprise, someone on the other side opened it for her.

"Hi! Welcome!" Looking up, the two girls' eyes came to rest on the features of another young woman, no older than twenty-five years of age. "Welcome to-well, we've never really-ha-come up with an official name for this place-that is, the management-er, rather, the man who owns this place. Haha, sorry about that, I get off track sometimes-" she laughed nervously, staring at Ryuko's shoes.

"Um, that's okay," Nonon said, scratching the back of her head as the feeling of awkwardness began to descend on the trio. "Anyhow…we're looking for a woman. Satsuki Kiryuin? Does she live here?" The short girl produced a picture of Satsuki.

*She's beautiful even in photographs…* Ryuko thought. *Wait. Huh? Like a beautiful sister, right? Why am I even having to reason with myself? I mean, let's be honest, she's pretty fucking hot-*

"Ryuko!" Nonon's shrill voice popped Ryuko's thought bubble like a needle. "She's here. Fifth floor, room 5c." She turned back to the young attendant. "Thank you so much," Nonon smiled, slipping the woman 20,000 yen. The woman stared in confusion at the strange currency as the two amateur detectives slunk up the stairs.

***

*Oh, shit! Fuck, that's bright.* The white gleam of the fluorescent bulb shot beams of light through crack in Satsuki's eyelids, seeming to pierce straight through to her brain. *AAH, my head!* Shaking arms managed to prop up the dark-haired woman's trembling form to a sitting position, her back supported by the cream colored walls. As her head moved from one side to the other, it scraped miniscule paint flecks from the peeling coat, sprinkling them down on her shoulders like pixie dust.

*What am I doing? What have I done? Is it too late-Is it too late to go back-* Satsuki's shoulders took control then, leading her whole being into sudden jerks and tremors as tearless, silent sobs racked her body.

*Makes sense, I suppose. You have no more tears left to cry. I seem do have done my job well. A "strong woman" like you should never shed a tear.*

"F-f-fuck y-you…I h-hate y-you-" The defiant daughter squeezed out between spasms. She drew her knees to her chest as best she could, placing her head between them. *Is it too late to go back to Ryuko?* "R-Ryuko-"

*BANG!* A loud bang on the door shook the flimsy room in its entirety. Satsuki's head jolted up, staring intensely at the bathroom door. Through it, a voice filtered in.

"Satsuki! Open the FUCKING door!" Satsuki stared, immobile, as the sound of her beloved sister's voice came to her ears. Her vision clouded as fresh tears began to flow from hidden aquifers, dripping from her chin and pooling at delicate feet. "Satsuki, if you don't open this door RIGHT NOW, I'm going to smash it-"

"Ryuko! You can't destroy property-" Nonon's familiar tone joined Ryuko's in what sounded like a symphony to Satsuki's ears.

"Fuck that! My sister's more important than a fucking door! All right, Sats! Here it comes!"

Satsuki wanted to say something. To scream, to cry out. To tell her sister that she was okay, that she was alive! But something in her refused to budge. It could've been the blood loss, or the alcohol. Shock, even. Whatever the reason, Ryuko's voice was all that resonated in her ears, drowning out the sound of splintering wood, the sound of scrambling feet searching all the two rooms in the house, the sound of the bathroom door being thrust open so hard it came off its hinges. And there before her stood the one person she loved above all else.

"Ryuko," she breathed.

"Satsuki," the younger sister exhaled, falling to her knees hard enough to crack the floor tiles.

"I-"

"I-"

"Satsu-" Nonon turned the corner into the bathroom, eyes full of worry. When she saw what lay before her, the worry melted away into tears of indescribable emotion.

Sister and sister, locked in embrace, crying liquid joy and sorrow. The time for catching up and explanations could wait. Now was the time to make up for lost memories.

End Notes

My first fic! It probably stinks, I know, but I am more than open to constructive criticism and suggestions. I will try to update it when possible, because studies are very time consuming. Apologies!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!